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SUBJECT: CHAVEZ SPEECH SHOWS MILITARY "CUBANIZATION" AFOOT

REF: A. A) IIR 6 902 9910 05
[B. B\) IIR 6 902 9878 05](#)
[C. C\) CARACAS 00020](#)

Classified By: ACTING POLITICAL COUNSELOR MARK WELLS FOR 1.4 (D)

Summary

[11.](#) (C) Summary: Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez on December 27 addressed the armed forces in an over two hour pep rally and romanticized Venezuelan history lesson that glorified the military's growing role in society. Peppering his remarks with anti-US rhetoric, he unveiled to the public a retro, olive-drab uniform for Venezuelan troops and announced a change in military doctrine that he said would hail back to Venezuela's independence-era "roots." He outlined the growth of domestic military manufacturing and reminded the troops of spending increases aimed at increasing their standard-of-living. The press reported opposition criticism of Chavez's attempts to emulate the Cuban armed forces in both doctrine and appearance. Although the media analysis is not far off the mark, the Venezuelan Armed Forces will be unlikely to translate doctrine into military readiness. In both timing and content, the speech shows Chavez's grip over the military is strengthening. End summary.

Back to the Roots: New Look, New Doctrine

[12.](#) (C) Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez addressed troops at Fuerte Tiuna, Caracas's principal military base, in a longer-than-usual (two hours and 15 minutes) year-end salute on December 27. Employing his usual histrionic cadence of calculated pauses and crescendos, Chavez announced the armed forces would return to its "roots" after a century of being hijacked by "imperialist" interests. Venezuelan history, recounted through his perspective of military heroes who resisted the designs of "imperial" powers, littered his speech. In particular, he singled out the exploits of independence hero Francisco de Miranda, although he glossed over Miranda's downfall at the hands of Simon Bolivar, who surrendered him to the Spanish. Chavez referred inaccurately to US history on two occasions, calling Alexander Hamilton president and mentioning Lincoln as a contemporary of Washington and Jefferson. Later, he faulted "colonialist" interests with trying to erase the true version of Venezuelan history. He concluded his speech with a swipe at SOUTHCOM and remarked that the military must "throw out the imperialist venom they have injected in us for 100 years."

[13.](#) (C) Chavez hailed the olive drab fatigues sported by soldiers in attendance as the new Bolivarian uniform, which, he asserted, resembled those worn by Venezuelan soldiers in the 18th century. (Note: the uniforms also resemble current Cuban uniforms. End note.) He said all soldiers should have the new uniform--dubbed "The Patriot"--by 2005. Chavez returned in the course of his speech to interject how well the new look suited his troops.

[14.](#) (C) Chavez also invoked Bolivar to change Venezuela's military doctrine. Bolivar, he said, opposed defensive strategies, which Chavez interpreted to mean Venezuela should accelerate its "ideological offensive." Chavez urged the creation of a civil-military committee to help his former military academy classmates draft a national security doctrine to be employed in "asymmetrical wars." Extolling the virtues of military education, he tasked all military schools, services, and commands with fomenting the new strategy.

The Engine of the Revolution

[15.](#) (C) A second current in Chavez's speech was his vision of the military as a tool to help spread his revolution throughout Venezuelan society. The ideological offensive, he said, should radiate outside the ranks of the armed forces to help build a new country. He celebrated the

role of the military in the referendum and regional elections. In an outburst of poetic hyperbole, he said "there aren't enough stones in the world to erect a statue in honor of the military's worthy role in fighting poverty..." Chavez predicted the military would reach to "the farthest corner of the planet" in its humanitarian mission. Expanding on the country's economic growth, which was "first-place in Latin America," Chavez tasked the military with helping the economy recover and singled out the leadership roles played by active duty and retired officers in parastatals.

16. (C) Chavez took issue with the view that the military should be apolitical, although he conceded it should not be "partisan." He lambasted media sources for sowing "indiscipline" by criticizing its political role. Later in the speech, he spent several minutes praising retired officers for running for governor.

Spending: A Bolivarian Military-Industrial Complex

17. (C) Chavez catalogued materiel being repaired in Venezuela, including tanks, submarines, thousands of rifles, and the first frigate ever refurbished in Venezuelan territory. Aircraft such as the Tucanos, the Broncos, and the F-5s also made his list. Although he admitted that fabric of sufficient quality could not yet be produced locally, he predicted that in 2005 Venezuela would be able to manufacture its own uniforms. (Note: We know of one major textile manufacturer who offered to bid on the uniforms but was turned down, presumably for political reasons. End note.) Chavez also noted the refurbishing of Venezuela's F-16s (refs A and B), without mentioning that such upgrades violate USG contract agreements. In an oblique jab at the United States, he said Venezuela has more powerful friends each day willing to assist its technological development without attaching strings. These friends became apparent to listeners as Chavez next referred to "advanced negotiations" for radar systems (note: Venezuela currently is considering buying such equipment from China and Ukraine. end note.) and the purchase of 41 Russian helicopters and 100,000 Russian rifles.

18. (C) Chavez also spent considerable time listing progress made in raising the military's standard of living. In particular, he highlighted that military personnel in 2004 had received a 30 percent raise, credits to buy cars, and hospital upgrades worth USD 8 million. Future plans included creating more military commissaries to sell subsidized food and improving military housing. Chavez noted he had just secured in China the financing of about USD 700 million for public and military residences (ref C).

Opposition Reaction

19. (C) Opposition reactions, which tended to focus on the change in uniform, were predictably pessimistic. Chavez's first defense minister, General (ret.) Raul Salazar suggested to the press that the military could be stocking itself with new munitions to repress the Venezuelan public. According to a press account, another retired senior officer predicted the new doctrine would embrace the Cuban strategy of engaging civilians in national defense.

Comment

10. (C) Chavez's control of the military quite likely is strengthening. The year-end speech marks six years that Chavez has had to marginalize and dismiss opposition officers. Meanwhile, new recruits have experienced six years of indoctrination, which his proposed "ideological offensive" will only serve to intensify. In addition to his attempts at flattery, the use of the military in nearly all aspects of his "revolution" signals to officers that a career in the armed forces offers opportunities. Moreover, the aforementioned perks are trickling down to key military personnel.

11. (C) The Venezuelan Armed Forces are currently incapable of warfighting and will remain so. Chavez probably will successfully replace Venezuela's old, US-based doctrine at least in part with Cuban military theory; his "asymmetrical warfare" strategy will be aimed at making a US invasion cost-prohibitive. Nevertheless, the consequences of the doctrinal shift will be merely ideological. The offensive nature of many of the weapons systems mentioned would be useless in an envisioned war with the United States. The announced acquisitions, production, and refurbishment, thus show Chavez seeks to distance his troops from the taint of US materiel while expanding his economic model of import

substitution.
Brownfield